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ABSTRACT

Seventeen thousand Marylanders affirmed the importance of specific citizenship competencies as graduation requirements. This was the finding when the Maryland State Department of Education surveyed citizens to answer the question of what competencies should be taught in the public schools. The citizenship competencies were approved as graduation requirements and became the basis for instruction and assessment in citizenship. The program Project Basic, requires that students know the characteristics, functions, and powers of local, state, and federal legislative bodies; the characteristics, functions, and powers of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government; terms of office for legislators and executive officers; characteristics of different forms of government; political systems; principles of democracy; rights and responsibilities of individuals; roles of political parties; and making and changing laws. The students are assessed by taking the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills. The first graduating class required to pass the test is the class of 1988. (SM)

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# IN MARYLAND, CITIZENSHIP IS BASIC

by

Larry Chamblin

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SPECIAL ISSUE

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# In Maryland, Citizenship Is Basic

What competencies should students acquire before they receive the state's high school diploma? What skills must adults possess to lead effective and satisfying lives?

The Maryland State Department of Education sought the answers to these questions when it conducted a broad public survey in 1978.

The survey was directed to 17,000 parents, students, state legislators, business and industry representatives, and other citizens. They responded by rating a preliminary list of competencies drawn up by a committee of students, parents, and educators.

In participating in the survey, members of the public laid the groundwork for Project Basic, the competency education project that marks its tenth anniversary this school year. From the project's inception, public participation has been viewed as important to its success.

"Without genuine and broad public support," comments Richard M. Petre, Assistant Deputy State Superintendent, "there was no way we were going to succeed in this very ambitious effort to put in place a solid foundation—or minimum skill level—under all public education in Maryland."

Maryland citizens responded to the survey by affirming the importance of competencies and knowledge relating to the duties, rights, and responsibilities of a citizen. The public's acknowledgement of the value of equipping all students with certain basic citizen's competencies confirmed a statement by the State Board of Education in its "Mission of Schooling" document that "The increasing complexity of our life together makes responsible citizenship more important than ever before."

Incidentally, the importance of citizenship has also been recognized by the Governor's Commission on Values Education, which set forth citizenship objectives and character objectives as the two parts of a values education curriculum. Citizenship is embedded in other programs ranging from environmental education to health education.

In 1979 the State Board of Education defined citizenship for Project Basic as encompassing knowledge and attitudes in five areas: responsibilities; law and justice; rights; governmental form, function, and process; and civic participation at the local, state, national, and international levels.

The objectives of these five areas were organized into three assessment groups: constitutional government; principles, rights, and responsibilities; and politics and political behavior. These groups, or domains, were developed by a statewide committee according to the similiarity of instruction method and content of the behaviors of each objective.

The content of citizenship cuts across social studies courses in history, contemporary issues, government, and civics. Specifically, the Project Basic citizenship program includes:

- powers of state and federal governments
- characteristics, functions, and powers of legislative, executive, and judicial branches
- how laws are made and changed
- principles of democracy
- property rights
- Bill of Rights

*(See BASICS, back page)*

# A Little History

1977 — **Mission of Schooling**
The State Board of Education adopts citizenship as one of five areas of Project Basic.

1978 — **Citizenship Competencies Validated**
17,000 Marylanders affirm the importance of specific citizenship competencies as graduation requirements.

The State Board of Education approves these competencies as graduation requirements, and they become the basis for instruction and assessment in citizenship.

1979-80 — **Instructional Implementation**
Local school systems include the competencies in their adopted courses of study.

The Maryland State Department of Education distributes to each school the *Project Basic Instructional Guide—Citizenship.*

1981 — **Local Superintendents Certification**
All school systems complete making citizenship objectives a part of their curriculum; each local superintendent certifies that fact to MSDE.

1982 — **Limited-English Proficient Students**
The State Board of Education determines that limited-English proficient students are subject to the same competency requirements for graduation as other students. (These students may request a one-year waiver the first year they are required to take the citizenship test.)

1983 — **Handicapped Students**
The State Board adopts the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills as a graduation requirement for the class of 1988, including handicapped students in levels I, II, and III.

1984 — **Modified for Handicapped Students**
The State Superintendent issues suggested assessment modification for handicapped students based on instructional needs as specified in their Individualized Education Plans.

1985 — **Instructional Guide**
MSDE distributes a revised *Project Basic Instructional Guide—Citizenship* that includes test specifications.

The State Board of Education determines that, beginning in 1988-89, handicapped students in levels IV, V, VI are to be subject to the same competency requirements for graduation as other students.

# Instructional Activities

Instruction is, of course, the most important aspect of the Maryland Citizenship Program. Since 1979-80, local school systems have included all of the citizenship objectives in their grades K-12 social studies curriculum. The objectives may be a part of a social studies, history, civics, government, or contemporary issues class. This year teachers will continue to emphasize the specific content in all classes in which the school system has placed the citizenship objectives. In addition to regular classroom instruction, several other instructional activities will occur:

### Appropriate Assistance

Any student who does not pass the test will receive additional help from teachers prior to the next scheduled test administration. That is why the tests are given as early as grade 9.

### New Instructional Materials

Local school systems have developed new and multi-media materials to assist instruction. Such materials and shared among school systems. The local school system's central office library media center can access materials through the statewide system, Maryland Educational Resources Library Information Network (MERLIN).

### Curriculum Adjustment

Several school systems are adjusting the placement of the citizenship objectives based on the change of the testing date to January in 1988. Teachers want to assure ample instructional opportunities prior to testing.

### Technical Assistance

Local school systems and the Maryland State Department of Education provide opportunities for use of resource persons. Such assistance may be teachers, supervisors of social studies or assessment specialists. The state/local facilitator for each school system coordinates requests for assistance.

### Citizenship Skills Network

The social studies specialists at the Maryland State Department of Education are organizing a network to provide information about the program. For information, call Patricia Watson, Specialist in Citizenship, Maryland State Department of Education, 659-2311.

# QUESTIONS ASKED ABOUT THE MARYLAND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM

## WHAT IS THE MARYLAND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM?

Project Basic establishes graduation prerequisites for students in five areas: basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics), survival, world of work, arts/physical education, and citizenship. More than 17,000 Maryland citizens helped determine what all Maryland students should learn in each of these areas prior to graduation. In the citizenship segment, the citizenship program identifies what is to be learned, calls for instruction of students in their regularly scheduled social studies classs, and assesses them on the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills.

## WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF CITIZENSHIP?

The State Board in 1979 adopted this definition of citizenship for Project Basic:

> The World of Citizenship encompasses the application of knowledge and attitudes in five areas: responsibilities; law and justice; rights; governmental form, function, and process; and civic participation at the local, state, national and international level.

## WHY IS CITIZENSHIP A GRADUATION PREREQUISITE?

The citizenship program responds with information and skills the students need to make a commitment to democracy, involvement in government, participation in elections, exercise of rights and responsibilities, and resolution of current problems. Students must demonstrate progress toward knowing this information and these skills.

## WHEN DOES THE GRADUATION REQUIREMENT GO INTO EFFECT?

The first graduating class required to pass the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills is the class of 1988. These students were notified of this requirement in 1983. The instructional program has been in place since 1981. This class was able to take the test early in either grade 9 or 10 depending on the local school system's social studies program. Either way, the class of 1988 may have at least six times to take the test by graduation.

## WHAT IS THE CONTENT TAUGHT IN THE MARYLAND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM?

The program requires that students must know the characteristics, functions, and powers of local, state, and federal legislative bodies; the characteristics, functions, and powers of the executive branch; qualifications and terms of office for legislators and executive officers; the characteristics, functions, and powers of the judiciary; characteristics of forms of government; characteristics of various political systems; principles of U.S. democracy; rights and responsibilities of the individual; roles of political parties; election process; making and changing law; and evaluation of public information.

## HOW DO SCHOOL SYSTEMS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM?

The testable content is taught at different grade levels (both elementary and secondary) and in different courses (social studies, history, government, contemporary issues, civics) depending on the curriculum in the local school system. However, every local school system teaches the content before students are tested as part of the regular classroom program. Resource materials to support instruction are available from the Maryland State Department of Education and each local school system. Any student who takes the test in grades 9, 10, or 11 and does not pass it receives appropriate assistance. This help is supplemental to the regular program.

## WHAT MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE FOR INSTRUCTING STUDENTS?

Social studies teachers from all local school systems helped develop an instructional guide entitled: *Project Basic Instructional Guide, Citizenship.* It was distributed statewide. The format is as follows:

I. Suggested Sample Activities
II. Independent Activities
III. Materials Needed

Each local school system has also developed instructional materials in support of the Maryland Citizenship Program. These are shared with other systems on the statewide computer resources network, MERLIN—Maryland Educational Resources Library Information Network.

## HOW IS THE CONTENT ORGANIZED FOR THE MARYLAND TEST OF CITIZENSHIP SKILLS?

The citizenship skills objectives were organized into three assessment domains: Constitutional Government; Principles, Rights, and Responsibilities; and Politics and Political Behavior. These domains were developed by a statewide group of instructional personnel according to their similarity of instructional method and content of the behaviors contained within them.

## HOW WAS THE MARYLAND TEST OF CITIZENSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPED?

The objectives for citizenship skills validated by public survey were translated into assessment specifications by Maryland instructional personnel. These specifications were then used to guide Maryland teachers in the writing of a pool of test questions. Different questions from the pool are used for the annual forms of the test.

## HOW IS THE MARYLAND TEST OF CITIZENSHIP SKILLS ADMINISTERED?

The test is administered annually to grade 9 students in local school systems and to grade 10 students in three, depending on where instruction occurs in the local school system's curriculum. All students, Grade 10 or above, who have not yet passed the test may retake it annually.

## HOW DO STUDENTS LEARN OF THEIR TEST RESULTS?

The Maryland State Department of Education releases the test results to the testing specialist in each of the local school systems. Each local school system provides test results to students, parents, schools, and the public.

## WHAT IS THE PASSING STANDARD?

The passing standard, represented as a scale score of 340, was recommended by teachers, principals, other educational personnel, students, and parents who took the test and studied projected pass rates. The standard represents a level of knowledge for citizenship skills that those judges felt a Maryland high school graduate should have.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A STUDENT DOES NOT PASS THE MARYLAND TEST OF CITIZENSHIP SKILLS?

That student must be provided additional instruction before he or she takes the test again. The student may continue to retake the test until it is passed.

## WHERE SHOULD QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MARYLAND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM BE DIRECTED LOCALLY?

In each school system, talk to either the supervisor of social studies at the local central office or the state local facilitator at the local central office. The facilitator serves as a liaison between the local school system and the Maryland State Department of Education, and can provide specific information and direct inquiries to the appropriate personnel.

## WHERE SHOULD SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE MARYLAND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM BE DIRECTED?

Many people across Maryland have helped develop the citizenship skills area of Project Basic. New ideas are welcomed for consideration. Suggestions/comments may be sent to:

Project Basic Office
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595

# Testing

The first graduating class required to pass the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills is the class of 1988. Some of these students first took the test as ninth graders in 1984-85; others first took the test as tenth graders in 1985-86. Local school systems determine in which grade to first test students in citizenship based on the grade instruction related to citizenship is offered.

### Test Schedule

At the request of local school systems, the schedule for the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills will change to January testing in 1987-88. To make this transition, the schedule of tests is a follows:

| 1986-87 | | 1987-88 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Retest: | October 1986 | Retest: | October 1987 |
| Test: | April 1987 | Test: | January 1988 |
| | | Retest: | April 1988 |

**1988-89 and thereafter**

| | |
|---|---|
| Test: | January 1989 |
| Retest: | April 1989 |

### Passing Rate

The table below shows the percentage of students who passed the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills the first time they took it.

| Grade | 1984-85 | 1985-86 |
|---|---|---|
| 9 | 58.6% | 64.9% |
| 10 | 61.4%* | 80.1% |

*No-fault year (to try out test and procedures)

## BASICS . . .

*(continued from page 1)*

- benefits of a system of law
- citizens' responsibilities
- public officials' responsibilities
- function of political parties
- evaluating public officials
- evaluating reliability of public information

All Maryland students receive instruction in those topics. Increasing numbers of students are showing mastery of the content, as measured by the Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills, by the ninth or tenth grades.

Students who do not pass the test receive appropriate assistance, or remedial instruction, to bring them up to the minimum standard. Teachers are challenged to use their best skills in providing appropriate assistance to students in citizenship and at the same time provide these students access to the rest of the social studies program.

Citizenship skills are not often viewed as basic skills like reading, math, or writing. Yet the citizens of Maryland have affirmed that citizenship, like those traditional academic basics, is essential to effective adulthood in America and to the continued health of this nation. Citizenship skills and knowledge, then, are foundations upon which an individual student's—as well as the nation's—future depends.

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